

History: Going to the “source”

This was the outline to the discussion that followed the reading from *A Message of Ancient Days*, chapter 3.1, focused on how social scientists and historians *know* what happened in ancient history.

- I. What is Pompeii and Herculaneum?
 - A. ancient cities in present day Italy, near Rome
 - B. ash from Mt. Vesuvius sealed remains of the city
- II. What were archaeologists about to learn about cities by **excavating** them?
(carefully digging up the remains of the past)
 - A. local sports games, from wall painting
 - B. elections in Pompeii, from campaign slogans
 - C. Romans kept watchdogs, from “beware of the dog” mosaics → “cave canem”
 - D. what they ate (bread, eggs, nuts, lentils)
- III. What sources do historians use to understand what happened long ago?
 - A. **artifacts** – objects made or significantly altered by humans; two types
 1. written sources - diaries, speeches, songs, poems, business records, tombs, calendars, maps, newspapers...
 2. non-written sources - jewelry, tools, coins, toys, architecture, monuments, tombs, cities, clothes, pottery...
 - B. **fossils** - remains of once living plants or animals
 1. bones, prints (leaf, finger, etc), petrified wood, shells, amber, teeth, food
 - C. oral tradition – legends, myths, beliefs
 1. might have been changed, but ancient oral tradition has been shown to be surprisingly accurate, especially with dates
 2. often eventually written down
- IV. When studying **prehistory** (history of the world before the invention of writing), fossils, artifacts, and oral history are the most important tools.
- V. Not all information from the past is easy to understand. Much of it requires interpretation.
 - A. **primary sources** - created at the time of an event, are typically uninterpreted
 - B. **secondary sources** - created after the event by people who studied and interpreted primary sources